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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are provided for disseminating information on teacher corps projects. Information is given on experienced disseminators such as existing networks that are available to help in planning. Suggestions are made on targeting information and marketing. (JD)

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INFORMATION

TEACHER CORPS
DISSEMINATION
PROJECT BULLETIN

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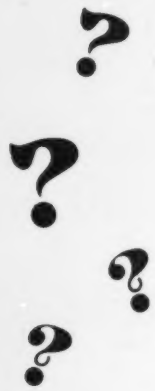
PREPARING FOR DISSEMINATION



What do you have? With whom are you working?

Will any of the key elements of your program be useful to other educators?

How much advance planning must be done to assure the cost-effective diffusion of your "demonstrable elements" to the larger educational community?

These questions are intended merely to suggest the scope of the dissemination challenge that faces every Teacher Corps project when it is first funded. The dissemination issue should be dealt with very early in each project's timeline—not in the last year or two of its activity. That's because various types of documentation will be needed and various actions should be taken right from the start if dissemination endeavors are to be fruitful for the project, for the funding agency, for the project's immediate clientele, and for educators outside Teacher Corps.

Who can help with this early planning?

Perhaps a local school district has served as host to a dissemination-oriented project and thus has staff with experience in product development, training, evaluation, and demonstration. Perhaps colleagues at a university have worked in the field with schools adopting or adapting innovations. A nearby regional educational laboratory is likely to employ one or more experienced dissemination professionals.

Or try the Regional Office of Educational Programs for your region; its dissemination group should be able to refer you to resource persons a short phone call away. Your state's ESEA Title I or IV coordinator, located in the state education agency (SEA), should be able to direct you to nearby expertise. And the National Diffusion Network (NDN) State Facilitators project in your state not only can provide advice but also will give you the name and phone number of an NDN Developer/Demonstrator project in your area. Talking or visiting with those dissemination professionals should provide you with a wealth of fresh insights into the national dissemination picture. (Names, addresses, and phone numbers may be found in the current edition of Educational Programs That Work.)

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FAR WEST LABORATORY
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Asking for Help

Every Teacher Corps project will receive its own copy of Handbook for Review and Validation of Teacher Corps Products and Practices. This new publication will provide guidelines for Teacher Corps personnel to assess educational products in order to show that something really works -- changes behavior or attitudes, enhances skills, or improves education in some tangible fashion. The handbook, developed by the Teacher Corps Dissemination Project, gives details on the DHEW Education Division's validation procedures under the aegis of the Joint Dissemination Review Panel. But the handbook isn't intended to give advice on dissemination as a total process; it simply shows how to get a product or practice approved as workable, effective, and useful.

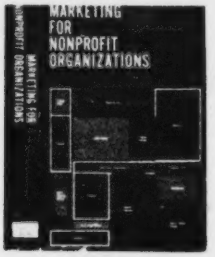
But there are many other dissemination activities that require advance planning -- your public information efforts; your public relations; your efforts to host visitors or give demonstrations in classroom settings or at local, state, regional, or national conferences; your record-keeping that will one day provide you with some likely prospects for adoption/adaptation of your project's key elements; your institutionalization planning for your school district and your teacher-training institutions; your relationships with nationwide and statewide dissemination networks and with professional associations.

Ask for planning help from others now. Visit successful dissemination projects. Learn from them very early the stumbling blocks that they encountered. Find out what quality assurance techniques they found most useful. Let these experienced disseminators walk you through some steps, such as:

* Understanding the dissemination process
* Identifying key elements of your program
* Developing materials
* Assessing adopters' needs
* Securing adoptions/adaptations
* Followup activities (including evaluation)
* Documenting success

These categories should not be viewed as rigid or linear. They are proposed simply to stimulate your questions when you meet with a dissemination resource person.

One key issue to resolve is: how much redundancy will be needed to assure successful dissemination. Running off 500 brochures and distributing them in the communities you serve is a simple enough task. But how many of the receivers of that printed "message" about your project will really understand your goals, your activities, your planned outcomes? Planned redundancy -- in the form of printed handouts, memos, personal visits, small- and large-group presentations, briefings for key staff, and so on -- is more efficient than scattered, one-shot experiments.



Targeting

Marketing products developed by nonprofit agencies or projects is a different proposition than those developed within the commercial sector. Nonprofit markets like to talk about product differentiation and market segmentation (see, for example, Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations by Philip Kotler, 1975). In other words, your task is to select the most effective media (people, publications, situations) that will spread the messages (or products) you wish others to receive and react to.

You might segment the market for your project in terms of some/all of the following:

* Community groups
* Parents (e.g., PTA, Title I or Follow Through councils)
* Local school district (teachers, administrators, Board members)
* School volunteers
* Resource centers, libraries, teacher centers
* Intermediate educational agencies
* State educational agency(ies)
* Departments of education at universities

. . . and so on. Will a single message serve all these audiences, or will you need to adapt your print materials or in-person presentations to the needs/interests of particular groups? Is a personal letter with selected back-up materials the right mode of communication, or will you ask to talk to the group at one of its regular meetings?

Developing Materials

Any description of your project (or its output) should be carefully planned. A leaflet or fact sheet should be written in plain English if you want people to understand it. An audiovisual presentation should be short -- with slides changing rapidly and with printed messages in large type (many people are nearsighted!) -- and sprightly. Workshops should have built-in variety and variation for participants. Products -- such as training or coordination manuals and knowledge publications -- should be functional, readable, well-organized (see, for example, Packaging Your Educational Program - ERIC ED 138 295).

Where can you find the makings of interesting publications? Perhaps some segments of your required reports to Teacher Corps headquarters would interest a wider audience. Perhaps you're running off copies of an item to share with your network or your colleagues -- but it would be useful to a wider audience. Perhaps a local newspaper has published a feature about your project and will give you permission to duplicate it as a handout. Possibilities for public information are not difficult to identify; ask a graduate journalism student, a local newspaper writer, or a person in your public affairs office for a little help in finding and preparing lively stories.

Nonprofit Marketing

Whatever you decide to disseminate -- products, practice, publications, or just upbeat messages -- must be marketed effectively and efficiently. Simply sending out gratis copies to every other Teacher Corps project may not be the ideal distribution mode. Perhaps each project needs multiple copies; perhaps some need none. Perhaps others with similar foci need your item more than others do. Perhaps other educational agencies need the item more urgently than certain Teacher Corps projects.

You may want to give away the first 100 or so copies to key opinionmakers or gatekeepers or media in an attempt to seed the market for copies you'll then offer for sale at cost. Be sure to discuss your marketing plans with your Federal program officer so that you don't violate any pertinent regulations.

If, by chance, you turn out some curricular materials, be sure you understand the textbook adoption procedures of your own state (if applicable) and/or of major urban school systems. If you plan to submit documents to ERIC, check the accessing procedures of that system. And if you look around, you'll discover a number of nonprofit publishing/selling mechanisms already operating that might accept your item(s) without an extensive subsidy.

Some Guidelines

As you begin to plan for dissemination, you can build on what's been learned in recent years via a number of major dissemination studies. From Synthesis of Five Recent Studies (ERIC ED 158 701) come these guidelines:

To be maximally effective, a dissemination strategy would:

a. Identify and gain access to clients by means of the personal referral networks and informal communication channels existing within the client social system. Although formal dissemination systems (ranging from "top-down" campaigns to direct mail, broad outreach tactics) will produce some impacts, they will be spotty and unsystematic and will include a large proportion of false starts. By contrast, the personal referral systems and social networks will provide low-energy access to targets with a much higher rate of intended consequences.

b. Use in-person (preferably face-to-face) communications, with accompanying "hard copy" materials. Both telephone and face-to-face contacts produce much stronger consequences than any other approach. Combining an in-person approach with use of the client referral network will produce an exceptionally high response to the dissemination efforts, and will have the most predictable and controllable consequences in terms of subsequent utilization.

c. Attend to and differentiate the organizational/bureaucratic nature of the client (school) systems. Schools are complex, loosely-coupled institutions with few incentives to change. The nature of useful information and assistance will vary considerably from one level in the organizational structure to another.

d. Target the primary level of entry at the organizational level most proximate to the intended locus of impact. Information and assistance intended for teachers should be targeted to teachers--not administrators--and vice versa. Teacher organizations as a point of entry and channel of contact have been generally underutilized.

e. Provide for and secure *prior informed concurrence* of all administrative levels *above* the level of primary interface. Informed concurrence often requires only a brief conversation with central-, intermediate-, and state-level administrative officers. If no action or resource provisions on their part are required, and if they stand to benefit (even remotely), concurrence will be easy to obtain. However, if prior concurrence is not obtained, chances for utilization at the target level are remote.

f. Make use of change agents, interventionists, linkers, facilitators, intermediaries, assistance groups, advocates (or whatever their title!) who are most homophilous with the target subculture. Basically, the intermediary must be both familiar and compatible with the norms, values, conventions, and social characteristics of the client subculture. Parents work best in effecting parent involvement; teachers identify best with other teachers or with those with extensive teaching experience; administrators relate to administrators, etc. It is next to impossible to "fake" homophily. Client attributes, awareness, and sensitivity must be genuine.

Continued on page 6

g. Ensure that all transactions between the intermediary and the client are coherent and coordinated with the general goals of the dissemination program. The assumption that the target clientele understand problems and shortcomings of a dissemination effort is both false and disastrous in its consequences. The intermediary is an alien to the target social system. It is crucial that the intermediary group have its "act" together, and that all transactions are well-coordinated across individual agents. The single most damaging error an intermediary can make is to fail to deliver or meet a commitment (follow-up contact, delivery, or whatever). Also, all transactions should be fully coordinated with the relevant administrative levels--both in the target organization and in the intermediary organization.

h. Provide opportunities for choice in the content and style of target group involvement. To the extent that clients are offered choices, they will make decisions and thereby increase their level of participation and involvement. The intermediary must be prepared for rejection by one or more target clients.

i. Focus on a limited number of clients, at least 25 percent fewer than can be "comfortably" accommodated at any one time. Overcommitment of intermediaries (or an overly ambitious dissemination program) is a common and serious strategic error. By intentionally "undershooting," the intensity of transactions will increase and the incidence of problems (which spread by word of mouth faster than do successes) will be under more direct control of the intermediary. Maximizing the ratio of successes to involvements will enhance the legitimacy of the effort. Firmly rooting the utilization will generate an advocate of the system--the well-served client.

j. Place early emphasis on the philosophy and ideology of the information, products, or services being disseminated. To the extent that the consciousness of the clients can be raised and the professional and personal advantages identified, a sense of enthusiasm and motivation will emerge among clients.

k. Make early use of concrete experiences, assignments, materials, and utilization-relevant activities. Initial client involvement activities are crucial. Clients will expect directions and expertise from the intermediary. Continued transactions will depend primarily on impressions and level of activity during the initial encounter. Doing something is essential.

l. Provide repeated in-person transactions with the client staff. One-shot or "hit-and-run" transactions will not produce sustained utilization. A distributed program of transactions graduated in terms of the type of utilization involved will be required. The extent and magnitude of this program will, of course, vary in terms of the dissemination program goals.

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m. Anticipate that utilization involving some form of implementation process will be gradual and cumulative. Nearly all studies show that two or more years are required before any new practice or procedure stabilizes. The first year is usually a period of becoming familiar with the mechanics--the "what, when, and how." Subsequent years involve internalization, accommodation, refinement, and further diffusion. The process is slow and requires rather continuous attention and support at the early stages. As the local staff gain experience with new procedures, external support can be withdrawn gradually.

Closing Down

A well-planned dissemination strategy will run from the beginning of the first year of project funding right on through to the period after Federal funding ends. As with other programs, you must ask yourself at some point: "What will happen to our products after Teacher Corps funding ceases to flow?" If the products/processes/practices you devise are validated by JDRP and succeed in gaining funding support from USOE's National Diffusion Network, then the outcomes remain available to others through your own Developer/ Demonstrator project.

But suppose your key elements don't fit into that particular niche. Where will you place them to assure they remain available and useful? Print products, of course, can be placed in the ERIC system. Other products may be accessed by your state agency's dissemination office or by an appropriate resource center at a university or at an intermediate service agency. A professional association may find your products attractive for distribution and sale to members and other educators. The Regional Exchange (a part of the NIE-supported Research and Development Exchange) nearest you may collect certain types of products and make them available to their clientele. Some projects have moved their output into small consulting organizations which then continue to provide technical assistance or training along with the products developed with Federal support. Always consult with your Washington project monitors before making any final decisions of this sort.

CALLING FOR

EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION IN TEACHER CORPS

We would like the INFORMATION Bulletin to serve as a vehicle for the exchange of information among Teacher Corps projects and networks. Specifically, we want projects to send us information about:

- products and practices under development
- innovations that have been implemented
- means for sharing information with other projects
- your good ideas! . . .

ADDITIONAL READINGS

In devising your dissemination plans, you may want to look at some of these references if you're not already familiar with them:

Baldridge, J. Victor & Deal, Terence E., ed. Managing Change in Educational Organizations. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Co., 1975.

Forms and Formalities (A Resource Containing Forms Currently Utilized by Members of the National Diffusion Network to Facilitate the Adoption and Implementation Process). San Francisco: Far West West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1978. (ERIC ED 153 662)

Havelock, Ronald. The Change Agent's Guide to Innovation in Education. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications, 1975.

James, C. R., et al. Developer's Guide: Preparing Materials for Distribution. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1976.

Schmuck, Richard A., et al. The Second Handbook of Organization Development in Schools (2nd edition). Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1977.

Sikorski, Linda, et al. Factors Influencing School Change. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1976.

Zaltman, Gerald, et al. Creating Social Change. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972. (out of print)

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